

'We are Gilbert & George': artist duo to visit Mona for first Australian show

Retrospective spanning five decades of artists' pictures from 1970 to 2014 will go on display at Hobart museum from 28 November

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Thursday 10 September 2015 02.08 BST

Gilbert & George, partners in art, life, fine tailoring and Turkish cuisine, will visit Australia in November for a major retrospective of their work at the Museum of Old and New Art in Hobart, Tasmania.

"We are Gilbert & George," declared the email and video which dropped into art lovers' inboxes on Thursday morning direct from the duo themselves. "We are coming all the way from London to celebrate the first exhibition of our pictures in Australasia, at Mona."

It's the third big international get in a row for David Walsh's privately funded museum, after Matthew Barney brought his River of Fundament film and exhibition to Mona in 2014 and Marina Abramovic opened her Private Archaeologies show earlier this year.

Curated by Nicole Durling and Olivier Varenne, Mona's co-directors of exhibitions, the show will span five decades of work from 1970 to 2014.

"Our pictures deal with the great universals: death, hope, life, fear, sex, money, race and religion," said Gilbert & George, who met at Central Saint Martins art school in London in 1967 and have worked as one artist ever since, even dining together at the same Turkish restaurant in Dalston every night.

"Art is the cure," they said of the often challenging themes in their work, during a Q&A with Guardian readers in 2014. "The freedom of the individual. We want our art to bring out the bigot from inside the liberal and conversely to bring out the liberal from inside the bigot. This is a full-time occupation. Love G&G."

Asked how their partnership worked, they responded: "We call this the great heterosexual question. We are equal in our partnership where most mixed couples are not. We don't cook, clean, shop or wash up. This makes a lot of ladies jealous."

The pair first visited Australia in 1973 for John Kaldor's public performance art project The Singing Sculpture in Sydney and Melbourne, in which they circled each other wearing their trademark bespoke suits, singing old music hall tunes for five hours at a time.

They returned with Kaldor in 2010 for a series of talks, but have never mounted a survey show in the region. Gilbert & George: The Art Exhibition will run at Mona from 28 November until 28 March 2016.

“This is your very first - and last - chance to see one hundred of our pictures,” their email stressed. “Seeing is believing. See for yourself.”

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